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In 1953, a Project for the Integration of New Immigrants from Eastern Europe was organized at the request of the Ford Foundation within the framework of the Welfare and Health Council of New York City. The purpose was to make available to highly educated refugees from Soviet-dominated countries and their families community services which would facilitate adjustment to life in the United States. In the fall of 1954, the funds were depleted and the Welfare and Health Council asked the Junior League of the City of New York to take over this teaching, using selected volunteer League members. The author points out that less educated immigrants knowing little or no English can usually find jobs if their skills or crafts are not dependent on a knowledge of the language, whereas the more highly educated immigrants often experience great difficulty finding work in their professional fields without a fluent knowledge of English. The program described here provides such highly educated foreign-born adults with "concentrated, high-level instruction in English, enabling them to improve their economic and social well-being and to obtain employment more nearly commensurate with that in their countries of origin." The author discusses some of the problems involved in setting up programs for volunteer teachers. (AMM)

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Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

*The Role of the Volunteer in Teaching English to Educated Foreign-Born Adults**

Joseph J. Brain

In 1953, a Project for the Integration of New Immigrants from Eastern Europe was organized within the framework of the Welfare and Health Council of New York City. The project was established at the request of the Ford Foundation. The purpose was to make available to highly educated escapees from Soviet-dominated countries and their families community services which would facilitate their adjustment to life in the United States.

In the fall of 1954, the funds dried up. The Junior League of the City of New York was then asked by the Welfare and Health Council to take over the teaching of English to these educated foreign-born. Miss Mary C. Hurlbutt, Director of the Council's Project, believed that under technical direction, volunteers could do a valuable job teaching fundamental English.

There were many volunteer English-teaching programs and public school classes available for most refugees. But a special program was needed for the educated. For many reasons, all of them financial, our public schools were not prepared to accept a challenge in which English could be taught in classrooms of maximum registers of ten to fifteen students.

We knew that the highly educated foreign-born immigrant students had particular characteristics. They brought with them mature, rich academic and linguistic experience. By virtue of this excellent cultural and educational background, they were able to grasp concepts more readily and learn more quickly than the average immigrant. However, these students had either been without employment in this country or had been placed in jobs that were not in keeping with their formal education. They were therefore apt to develop handicaps of prejudices and fears created by their dislocation. Those who had very menial jobs became fatigued and despondent, thus challenging the ingenuity of the teacher in retaining their interest in classwork.

There was also another vital factor—our country greatly needed their professional skills. Our policy was to give these professionals the highest immigration priority. When they arrived, they could not function in their fields because of insufficient background in English. License examinations had to be taken in English. Professional review courses had to be taken in English. In many cases we required them to take additional courses, and these in English also. You could be a good wage-earner if you were a shoemaker,

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* This paper was presented at the TESOL Convention, April 1967.

Mr. Brain, Technical Director of the English Teaching Program of the New York Junior League, is the author of English grammar, composition, and spelling textbooks (Blue Book Series, Regents Publishing Company).

tailor, carpenter, or steel worker, almost upon immediate arrival in our country, even though you had a limited amount of English. But only the exceptional professionals could function with a limited amount of English; the average could not.

This unique program is now in its twelfth year of operation, and we can still say that no other agency in New York, or perhaps in the entire country, provides such a service. With the help of League volunteers, highly educated foreign-born adults can receive concentrated, high-level instruction in English to enable them to improve their economic and social well-being and to obtain employment more nearly commensurate with that in their countries of origin. Classes which are limited to adults with university degrees range from eight to fifteen students. Our teacher volunteers serve two hours per week, while students are required to attend four hours. Definite time schedules are set up. Classes meet on Monday and Wednesday 6:00–8:00 p.m. or 8:00–10:00 p.m., and are graded for three levels of literacy: beginners, intermediates, advanced. Each room is furnished with a chalkboard, chalk, eraser, chairs, and tables. Supplementary texts, audio-visual equipment, pencils, paper, newspapers, and other materials are supplied by the office when needed. The students purchase the textbooks from us at a discount of ten to twenty percent. There is no other expense or tuition fee.

Over the last twelve years the New York Junior League has trained and used over 500 volunteers who serve as teachers, substitute teachers and/or administrative assistants in teaching English to foreign-born adults. Over this period these volunteers accumulated a joint aggregate total of 40,000 service hours. A quick computer calculation tells us that this is equivalent to approximately four and a half solid years of time accumulation.

Our total student body attendance averages 6,666 cumulative hours per year. Again, using the same computer, we find that over the twelve-year period our students accumulated about 80,000 clock hours.

Now that you know a bit about our program, let us digress and briefly discuss the role of the volunteer. This will not be the complete story of the problems and crises which volunteer English-teaching programs for adults must surmount. I cannot be certain that I will be painting an entirely accurate picture, but this is what it looks like from my experience.

Our country has many kindred adult souls who, because of reasons of their own, serve as volunteer teachers. A great many such teachers are freely giving their services in some form of English teaching. They teach or tutor non-English-speaking or English-speaking illiterates. Some work with children, others with adults. One thing is *certain*, they all achieve a creative satisfaction from giving service to others. Some even come from families which have a long tradition in this type of service. Some are affiliated with an organization, and others serve purely on their own. The *uncertain* factors are whether they are doing right by their students and whether they are doing the best possible job. Having a self-determined, general, noble aim for serving as a volunteer in a community activity is one thing. Being certain that your service is of

the highest quality is another.

The volunteer literacy teacher of English to adults has some very special problems. These teachers can be found in most large and many small cities. The largest numbers are in the industrial centers. The volunteer's specific aim is identical to that of the professional teacher's: namely, to assist an adult who is illiterate in English to learn to communicate in the oral and/or written form of English so as to earn a better living and to take advantage of our halls of learning for himself and his family; to enable him to communicate more intelligibly with his neighbors; to help him understand American culture better; and to help him become a worthwhile, productive, and concerned American citizen. Any person with so noble an aim deserves to be helped and recognized.

Unfortunately, only one published research survey has been brought to my attention which attempts to inform us through a scientific procedure exactly what kind of people serve as volunteer teachers. Richard W. Cortright, the Director of Education for the Laubach Literacy Fund, made such a study several years ago. He studied the volunteers who were participants in the Washington, D.C., Literacy Council's Workshops. The workshop was a training program for volunteers who wanted to learn how to begin teaching adults with limited reading ability. No attempt was made to recruit participants of any specific age, occupation, religion, social position, educational background, or prior volunteer participation in adult education. In brief, some of his significant findings were the following:

1. The mean age for men was 42.7, for women, 42.9.
2. 66.0% of the men were in a profession; 30% were female members of a profession.
3. The mean educational achievement of participants was more than a bachelor's degree. Very few had only a high school education or less.

In summary, these volunteers were people in early middle age who were fairly well educated.

The problems involved in setting up a program for volunteer teachers are many, but certainly not overwhelming if approached properly. There are numerous churches, unions, business establishments, national groups, social philanthropic groups, hospitals, health centers, and library centers which use only amateur teachers or partially staff themselves with such teachers. They serve as teachers of classes or groups, as tutors, assistant teachers, and even as administrators. Examples of such organizations are The National Council of Jewish Women with several hundred such volunteers over the nation, Midtown International Center with 265 volunteers, American Council for Emigrés in the Professions with 48 in New York City, The Junior Leagues of America with about 400 such volunteers. The American Council for Nationality Services has 37 member agencies, and they each have from 2 to over 1,000 volunteers. As a matter of fact, it is considered by many competent observers that the voluntary organization is the single most influential adult educative setting in our society. The national organizations alone number some 5,000.

One can well understand the tremendous influence, interest, and impact these programs have in many

communities. These programs grow out of a community need. Some do, but most do *not* get financial assistance from a government or business agency. Most of them are self-supporting, chiefly through contributions. It is rare that a fee is charged the student.

None of these organizations is in competition with the university, college, private or public school of a community. It is a known fact that in many parts of our land the public schools frequently provide help and leadership in training volunteers in the methods of adult education. They set up program-planning clinics and leadership-training institutes. Many adult students attend English classes in a formal school setting during the day and a volunteer program at night with the hope that they will learn to understand, speak, read and write that much sooner and better. The students have little money to spare. Some are ill, hospitalized, or aged and cannot get to a distant private or public school. Some work during the hours when these schools hold scheduled classes. Others have compelling home and personal problems. Some are on welfare. The volunteer program also serves those who attend trade or professional schools for courses other than English. The sponsoring agency can arrange classes or individual tutoring to meet almost every situation, whereas a school rarely can provide this kind of highly personalized attention.

Once the need is established within the community for such classes or groups, the problem of a sponsoring agency comes into being. The sponsor must be prepared for an immediate outlay of funds to be used for space, supplies, books, and perhaps a salaried administrator. The sponsor is also responsible for establishing and maintaining good community-school-teacher-student rapport. The sponsor must also believe firmly that this program and the amateur teachers who serve it are the best they can possibly supply for their particular students.

The problem of where to hold classes must be faced quickly. Classes of this type are held in almost every known variety of available space: in rented halls and rooms; in the apartments of the teachers; in stores, clubhouses, hospital corridors, church assembly rooms, and warehouses. Some have comfortable surroundings and furnishings; others use hardbacked benches, improvised tables, and old kitchen chairs as part of the furnishings. In some cases, a blackboard is a luxury. The quality of ventilation, heat, and light also runs the gamut. Some do and some do not have lavatory facilities. Many are in nonfireproof quarters. But, however comfortable or uncomfortable the decor may be, the teachers are there to give quality instruction in English to the best of their ability. The larger the sponsoring agency, the more comfortable the quarters are apt to be. Unfortunately, many of the organizations are very small.

A sponsoring organization is usually plagued with the question of where to get amateur teachers and how to select and train such people. Some organizations depend on retired professional teachers whose experiences vary from nursery school teaching all the way to teaching at the university level. Others depend on housewives, university students, high school students, retired or active businessmen, and people in the professions. There are others who de-

pend on semi-trained college students who are interested in making a career out of teaching English to foreign-born or American-born illiterate adults.

The Junior League of the City of New York's English Teaching Committee requires every member assigned to its program to serve two hours per week for a forty-two week semester. They are permitted only two unexcused absences. Most of the women are below forty years of age, and very few have had any teaching experience of substantial measure prior to joining the program. The teachers are selected on the basis of their interest, English speech pattern, and a knowledge of another language. The last point is important because we want volunteers who have some familiarity with the pains of learning another language, thereby being better equipped to understand their students' problems in the learning of a new language. The curriculum is controlled by the director through a sequential master plan technique.

Unfortunately, most other sponsoring organizations are not as careful in selecting teachers, and many of them will employ almost anyone who speaks English and shows an interest. The result of this type of selection is frequently an amateur teacher who may hinder the student's progress rather than advance it.

The type of training which some of these amateur teachers receive frequently comes from a variety of sources. The training will vary from nothing at all to a well-planned and supervised training program, as is found at the Junior League of New York and the Citizenship Council of Cincinnati, Ohio. The National Council on Naturalization and Citizenship frequently arranges conferences and workshops, and observations. The success of the training does not depend upon which type or variety of training technique is used, but rather upon how it is planned and carried forward to completion.

Training at the Junior League of New York requires a minimum of ten two-hour sessions and includes workshops, observations, tutoring experience, substitute teaching experience, critical evaluations by the director, study of bulletins, and administrative training. Some of this training will take place while the teacher is actually working with her class. This training in depth is necessary because all of our students have at least an undergraduate degree from a university in a foreign land and must have worked in their professions prior to arrival in this country. Our students are directed to us through thirty-six cooperating agencies, or the students and alumni themselves refer their friends and relatives.

Most of the volunteer agencies consider themselves as teachers of "Conversational English." Methodology will vary greatly from translating to the most contemporary in applied linguistics. Some programs will only engage their students in conversation with a little work in pronunciation and sentence pattern drills; others go all out and teach all aspects of the language arts.

Not all agencies have classes as such. As a matter of fact, most of them only do tutoring on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis. Those which maintain classes usually arrange them by language background or in homogeneous

groups according to the students' literacy ability in English.

One of the most important steps in all of these programs is the selection of the director. Some are volunteers who have had some professional teaching experience. Others are formally trained, experienced, professional administrators who are specialists in this field of English teaching and are paid. Still others are people who have been volunteers themselves but have more experience in the field than others. And finally, you have the category I fall into. I served as a volunteer amateur teacher, as a professional teacher, supervisor, and administrator in the public schools.

Some of the pressing issues involved in the role of the volunteer teacher of English to foreign-born adults are those of leadership, communication, and financial aid.

Leadership in volunteer work is wide-open to opportunity, but somewhat disorganized. Most of the national organizations involved in volunteer work belong to the Council of National Organizations of the Adult Education Council. It would perhaps be wise to organize *local* chapters of this Council and enable some of our church and community centers who sponsor such classes to join. This would also be an instrument for effective deployment of both professional educational personnel, volunteers and agency resources in the improvement of local participation, leadership and membership training, and educational programming.

In regard to communication, barriers still exist between professional adult educators and those who function as teachers of adults in voluntary organizations. A strong effort must be made to eliminate these barriers.

Finally, almost all of the volunteer programs are undersupplied financially. The larger educational institutions (be they public or private) might benefit greatly from open and strong support of the work done by the volunteer. This does not mean to imply that the volunteer should be paid. But, he would like to have more guidance and leadership from a professional institution, a good room to use when he works, adequate textbooks and supplies, and information about and use of programming materials. Some organizations such as my own have been successful in securing funds from philanthropic organizations. Others might also be able to do the same.